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#### **BRAHMABANDHAV UPADHYAYA (1861 - 1907)**

##### ***His background and approach***

Many anthologies of Indian Christian Theology omit Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya. The reasons for some considering him a Christian and others not, as we shall see later, can be found in his own autobiography – though it is not for us to judge whether one is a Christian or not. But for us Brahmabandhav is one of the most important figures in Indian Christian Theology. He has written profusely on almost every aspect of the Christian message. He lived in a time when theological turmoil in Hinduism was perhaps at its greatest. This was the time of the ABC movements in Hinduism – Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, and Christo Samaj. In this section we shall study this atmosphere briefly.

##### **THE THEOLOGICAL ATMOSPHERE**

Awakened by the Christian message itself the Arya Samaj of Dayanand Saraswati was an extreme form of resurgence. Brahma Samaj of K.C. Sen was a milder form of the same, while the Christo Samaj of Kalicharan Banerjee was even more positive in its attitude towards Christianity. But all these were the products of the time. Following the national patriotic spirit of the times, these were different efforts of indigenisation of the Christian message and the church. Yet, these Samajes had little or no impact on the vast Hindu population but were confined in influence to a selected few. It was rather the non-intellectual message of Shri Ramakrishna (see the section on Vivekananda) which really appealed to the multitude and thus was a greater challenge to Christianity. In no small measure does the success of Ramakrishna owe to his indigenous lifestyle, language and method of teaching, devoid of all philosophical jargon. Perhaps a case can be made also for the super-

natural element in Ramakrishna's life, such as his occultic visions and trances. The crown of Ramakrishna's success is evident in an intellectual of no lesser caliber than Vivekananda becoming his disciple, and that blindly, as we have seen. Does it not say something about the limitations of intellectual form of the Christian message?

Brahmabandhav was aware of all these movements. In fact he was a classmate and even a bosom friend of Vivekananda. He met of course K.C. Sen, whom he held to be very Christ-centered and Christian and he had also contacts with Kalicharan Banerjee, the nationalist who was the founder of Christo Samaj. With Vivekananda Brahmabandhav was also very much attracted towards Ramakrishna, as both of them were attracted also towards K.C. Sen's Christ-centredness. But later, while Vivekananda followed Ramakrishna, Brahmabandhav followed K.C. Sen.

There were also two other scents in the atmosphere at the time. One was the intoxicating nationalism. Leaving his family Brahmabandhav came to live with his uncle in Calcutta — where creativity was at its highest — he could not but integrate the nationalistic spirit with his cultural religious enthusiasm. The other scent is that of Vivekananda's offensive in seeing the Christian message through Hindu eyes. The Swami's Advaita was such a high fashion of the day that even the Bible was interpreted according to vedantic principles. For example, Vivekananda's disciple Sri Parananda (see also Boyd) interpreted Mt. 6:12 "forgive us our debts", as follows:

And let that communion be so complete as to efface all differentiating sense of 'I' and Thou' or of obligations left undone by me, Mayest thou, O Lord, graciously annul the relation of debtor and creditor and make me one with thee.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of all this was to show that the Christian message is only a part of Hinduism and so can be absorbed by the latter. It was difficult of course for any Christian to maintain the uniqueness of Christ in the light of these movements. Unless we understand Brahmabandhav in the light of these movements we do not understand him at all.

## BRAHMABANDHAV'S LIFE

Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya was born Bhawani Charan Banerjee (1861-1907). 'Vandyaji' was a family title which in due time got anglicised into Banerjee. Brahmabandhav is a translation of the Greek *Theophilus* meaning a friend of God which he took upon himself at the time of his baptism. Upadhyaya, his family name meaning teacher, was the name he took at the time of becoming a *sanyasi*, as we shall see later. Brahmabandhav was born in Khanyan near Calcutta in a Brahmin family. His father was a Police inspector and thus both religiously and socially influential. His mother died when he was only a few months old and he was brought by a very orthodox grandmother. His uncle, Kalicharan Banerjee often visited his home and so Brahmabandhav seems to have been introduced to Christianity already in his childhood. (At the death bed of his father he read a Christian book called *Catholic Beliefs* which also seems to have influenced his attitude towards Christianity.) Later, when his father moved to Calcutta Brahmabandhav continued his schooling at the Scottish Mission School then in Hooghly College and finally in the Metropolitan College. Already when 16 years old in high school he was a burning patriot and had radical idea of overthrowing the British government through military revolution. In fact along with his friends he planned to become a soldier and with the help of the free kingdom of Gwalior to fight and drive away the British. But the rather childish plan was thwarted when the family came to know of it and sent them back to school. Brahmabandhav became a frustrated man and became a teacher.

He seemed to have got acquainted with Vivekananda around 1880 in his college days. Being sincere seekers, they both became friends and joined the Brahma Samaj. They also used to attend Ramakrishna's meetings regularly. Attracted by K.C. Sen's message Brahmabandhav became a staunch Brahma missionary and was sent in 1888 to Hyderabad (Sind). There he met two missionaries of the CMS, Rodman and Heaton, gradually led him to Christ. Already at this early age Brahmabandhav was concerned

with the two basic elements of the Christian message – the fact of the Resurrection and the truth of Jesus’ deity. Being convinced of both, he was baptized in 1891 in the Church of England. It is important to notice that already at this time Brahmabandhav took Christ as the fulfillment of the Hindu ideal of a sinless guru. This element seems to have remained more or less throughout his life, though some contradiction developed later.

Unfortunately at this time, owing both to the strong family pressure as well as to the questioning by a Roman Catholic friend against his baptism Brahmabandhav wavered in his faith. Led by this friend he ultimately took a second baptism, joining the Roman Catholic Church the same year. That is the time when he took the name Brahmabandhav as we have seen. This anti-Protestantism remained in him throughout his writings. But to his credit we must remember that when his family and the Arya Samaj persecuted and even stoned him, he along with his friends and disciples remained true to the new faith he had found, though he was disinherited by the Hindu society.

During 1902-1903 he visited Europe and was surprised to find idols in Christians Churches all over Europe. He returned to India with the strong conviction that the pure message of Christ had been westernized and diluted. His emphasis henceforth was to bring back the pure message in Indian terms. He discovered that Indian churches and their worship, along with the dress and the lifestyle of Christians, were also western. So in order to become indigenous he discarded the western clothes and took to *sanyasa*. That is the time he called himself Upadhyaya. But he went even one step further. In order to detach himself from the western “pollution” he took a ceremony of *prayschitta*, i.e. repentance and purification, and joined back into the Hindu fold. Though Hindus accepted him after this ceremony as fully Hindu, apparently Brahmabandhav did not seem to think that way, for as we see in his theology later on, he called himself a Christian Hindu. His own Roman Catholic Church priests did not allow him to join Christian worship in the

robe of *sanyasi*. But after appealing to higher authorities on the basis that even Roberto de Nobili had done that, he was given permission. But he was partly disenchanted by the church structure. So he went on as Jesus did and toured all over India, teaching and preaching. He also added a new Indian element – begging like a mendicant. Along with his disciples he worked hard among the poor and the sick. Even in times of epidemics, when some of his friends died, he bravely worked towards the healing of the disease.

Several events from the mature part of his life must be mentioned. During these years we can see some drastic changes taking place in his life and thinking. In a school for Hindu boys where he was working he encouraged pupils to venerate and worship both Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and Krishna. His defense was that these deities were avatars but Christ was an incarnation, which is an entirely different level. Later on, in a dialogue with J.N. Farquhar he mentioned the same distinction. But it seems that he had lost the sympathy of the Christian leaders for this view point. They felt he was making Christ one among the several gods as Hinduism does. Perhaps one major change during the last few years of his life was that Brahmabandhav took entirely to political action and writing. He started a Bengali daily called *Sandhya* which was a very radical political provocation, which the British held to be very dangerous.

He began to maintain he was fully a Hindu, at the same time a Christian. He called himself culturally a Hindu, whereas by faith a Christian. He was arrested in 1907 on charge of sedition. He appealed in the court, not in his *sanyasi* robes, but identifying himself as a Bengali brahmin. He was released on bail but knew that he was going to be arrested soon after. But before the arrest, he died in an operation at the age of 46.

### **Theological Writing**

Like all creative thinkers, he did not produce any *summa theologica* though he was perhaps the nearest to that. His main theological writings are to be found in the three

periodicals he started and edited. *Sandhya* we have already mentioned. The other two were *Sophia* (published first as a monthly and later as a weekly), meaning wisdom. Some of his main articles include: "Conversion of India", "Our Attitude Towards Hinduism", "Are we Hindus?", "Theism in the Vedas", "The Origin of Man", "Hindu Philosophy and Christianity", "The Clothes of Catholic Faith", "The Trinity", "The Incarnate Logos", "The True Doctrine of Maya", "The Hymn 'Ka'" and the like. For a full bibliography of his writings please see K. Baago's Bibliography, and Gispert Sauch (ed.), *Theology of Bramabandab Upadhyay*.

### **Theological Method**

Before going on to study in detail Brahmabandhav's theology it is necessary here to analyze two aspects of his methodology.

a) As it comes clearly in his biography, his whole theological thinking was motivated by his very genuine concern for indigenous expression of Christian faith and life, as Russell Chandran properly evaluates. Chandran says that there are four aspects in which this indigenisation comes to the fore:

- (1) Integration of the social structure of India into Christian way of life;
- (2) The establishment of an Indian Christian monastic order;
- (3) The employment of Vedanta for the expression of Christian theology; and
- (4) The recognition of the Vedas as the Indian Old Testament.

Scholars are divided as to whether Brahmabandhav took to the Vedas or the Vedantic philosophy but that need not stop us at this juncture.

b) Brahmabandhav also had a very concrete method as how this indigenisation of Christian message in India should take place.

He says it is a three-fold task:

First to eradicate from the minds of the Indian people the erroneous and mischievous doctrines (pantheism and transmigration); Secondly, to lay the basis of Theism by the help of the Vedas; and Thirdly, to build Christianity on that foundation.

Thus the discussion concerning 'pre-understanding' and 'indigenisation' which are now occupying the efforts of the theologians seem to be anticipated by Brahmabandhav by several decades. And obviously these two aspects of his approach also show us what kind of content his theology has.

### **Theological Emphases**

Perhaps somewhat simplistically, we can divide Brahmabandhav's theology under three main headings

1. his understanding of religion,
2. his understanding of God and Christ
3. his understanding of the Indian Church.

### **CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS**

Unquestionably, Brahmabandhav's basis for all his thinking is the distinction made by the medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas, between nature and supernature (or grace). Very paradoxically, though he builds all his theological thought on this Roman Catholic basis, yet he rejects it in order to replace it by the Vedantic type of thinking. By now we should be able to say why this contradiction arises. The credit of applying Thomism (the theology of Thomas Aquinas) to Indian interpretation must go to Brahmabandhav – not even did de Nobili do this.

Why does he do so? His understanding of Protestant missionaries was that they approached Hinduism primarily to find fault with the Hindu thinking, hoping that by this demolition of Hinduism Hindus will be converted to Christ. He felt this was too negative an attitude towards Hinduism. On the other hand, Catholicism, with its distinction between nature and supernature, gave room for natural theology built on human reason on which the supernatural

grace or the theology of revelation can be built. This was definitely a more positive attitude towards to Hinduism, and appealed to the nationalistic spirit of the time. Hence he describes the basis of the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity as follows:

It is on account of the close connection between the natural and the supernatural that we have taken ourselves the task of expounding the Hindu scripture systematically and of fishing out the theistic truths from the deluge of pantheism, idolatry and anthropomorphism and thus glorify him who enlightens every man who cometh into the world.

He is also clear as to the implications of this principle:

The light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world (Justin Martyr's *logos spermatikos*) is brightest in the thought of the Vedas perhaps with the possible exception of ancient Greece. Thus it is the pure Hinduism of the Vedas which is the nearest to the gospels, but the later Hinduism has been polluted by two developments, the doctrine of reincarnation and transmigration on the one hand, and the Advaita philosophy on the other.

Further he says,

we consider these two doctrines the two greatest enemies of mankind . . . we accept as our own the primitive Theistic truth taught in her shastras.

It is for this reason that Brahmabandhav attacks the Advaitic philosophies of Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj, who accept these two dangerous doctrines in one form or another. Thus his main aim was to lead Hinduism back to its original form and thereby pave the way for the Christian faith, as Baago affirms:

(i) Not only is Hinduism not perfect but even Christianity is not perfect. Thanks to the *Logos Spermatikos* idea, he finds that Christianity can come to its fullness only in contact with the natural theologies around the world, and especially the pure Vedantic Hinduism. "The development of the Christian religion has not come to an end. It will grow, blossom and fructify till the end of time".<sup>2</sup>

(ii) He also finds it is rather the western form of Christianity which is misleading and ought to be got rid of.

Thus following the Thomistic distinction Brahmabandhav says that Christianity should not come as

the destroyer of Hinduism, but as it is fulfillment. "The primitive (Hinduism) and the new (Christianity) are linked together as root trunk base and structure, as outline and filling." Since root is a first and then is the trunk, foundation is first and then the superstructure so also nature is first and supernature is later. Brahmabandhav strives to make Hinduism the foundation on which the superstructure of Christianity can be built. This is what he calls Vedic Christian theology.

It is also in this connection that Brahmabandhav dwelt on the parallels between the Old Testament and the Vedas. But since the Vedas contain the Old Testament understanding of God and nature only spasmodically here and there, he was not really able to build successfully an adequate Vedic Christian Theology. Perhaps this is the reason why Brahmabandhav shifted his emphasis. This does not mean that he rejected the Vedas but simply for the sake of the clarity he resorted to Vedanta, which can be linked to the Old Testament. Kaj Baago's comment that in 1898 there was a decisive turning point in Brahmabandhav, in his shift from the Vedas to Vedanta, must therefore be qualified.

The main obstacle for Brahmabandhav in accepting Shankara's Vedanta was the latter's interpretation of *maya* to mean that it is unreal. But later he interpreted *maya* to mean not illusion or unreal existence but a dependent existence — that all things created are depending on God. Then he was ready to accept the Vedanta as his foundation for Christianity.

Before we leave his theology of religions one more aspect must be noted. It was again Brahmabandhav who was the first to differentiate between Hinduism as culture and Christianity as religion. In his own words:

By birth we are Hindus and shall remain Hindus till death, but as *dwija* (twice born), by virtue of our sacramental rebirth, we are catholics, we are members of the indefectible communion embracing all ages and climes.<sup>3</sup>

That means: in customs, manners and social relationships we are Hindus, in our faith we are not Hindus but universal or catholic. To quote him once again:

Our *dharma* has two branches *samaj dharma* and *sadhana dharma*. Our Hinduism is preserved by the strength of *samaj dharma* while the *sadhana dharma* is of the individual. Its object is *sadhana* and *mukti* (salvation).<sup>4</sup>

Boyd penetratingly observes here that Brahmabandhav is advocating that Christians accept cultural Hinduism without accepting it as a religion. Or in other words, just as earlier Christianity was married to Greek culture, the Indian Christianity must be married to Hindu culture. That is what is meant by Christian Hindu. This is the reason why Brahmabandhav is called the Indian Clement, since he understands Hinduism as a tutor to Christ as Clement of Alexandria understood Greek philosophy as a tutor to Christ. This brings us to his Christology.

#### GOD AND CHRIST

Once Brahmabandhav understands *Maya* to mean dependent existence or second reality, he is at pains to portray the God whom Christians worship to be beyond this level of *Maya*. Otherwise such a God would not appeal to Him and specially the Vedantins. So for him God is not *Ishwara* but the very highest — Brahman or Para Brahman — not Saguna Brahman as some have tried to understand. Brahmabandhav is keen to understand god as Nirguna Brahman. Here Boyd's apt phrase that Brahmabandhav "gives nothing but the highest honour" summarizes his Christology beautifully. In fact he calls himself not just a 'theophilus' but in his thinking, even higher than that — 'Brahmabandhav'.

But if Christians should understand God as Nirguna Brahman, i.e. attributeless, relationless and impersonal, then should they also call God *neti neti* (not this not that, i.e., agnostic)? Does not then God become, as in the case of Shankara's Vedanta, unknowable? We find that Brahmabandhav reconciles this contradiction by resorting to K.C. Sen's concept of God as *saccidananda*. If Shankara,

in spite of belonging to natural theology, found it necessary to understand Nirguna Brahman as *saccidananda*, then Brahmabandhav contends, how much more can a Christian understanding of *saccidananda* show the true nature of God. Therefore Brahmabandhav's concept of God is basically Trinitarian. He knows that this is a mystery, which can be known only through the revelation in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Two key concepts helped Brahmabandhav overcome this contradiction. One is the understanding of Christ as *cit*, or the revelation of God's inner being. As *cit* Christ's uniqueness lies in "his unfolding the mystery of God's inner life". This is also Christ's claim to His divinity. Here Brahmabandhav also gives his understanding of atonement and sin. For him sin is the bondage which cannot be undone by *Karma*, because it is alienation from God.

By choosing the finite (anatma) as our goal we incur spiritual death and darken our understanding . . . sin leads to bondage and darkness from which there can be no escape, not withstanding the hardest struggle on our part. Thus the only way we can find salvation is God compassionately accepting upon himself sorrow and suffering for our transgressions.

Another concept is that of *maya*. For Brahmabandhav *maya* is not a quality of being dependent, it is also a divine overflow of energy which results in the existence of creatures.

*Maya* is a mysterious divine operation. It is neither real nor unreal. We cannot explain how the phenomenal multiplicity results from the immutable unity, how being is communicated to the finite . . . *maya* is neither real nor necessary nor unreal but contingent. By it non-being (*asat*) is made being (*sat*) . . . by it that which is nothingness by itself filled with the riches of being.<sup>6</sup>

Here Brahmabandhav resorts to Thomas Aquinas' understanding of *creatio passiva* (passive creation) and equates that with *maya*. Thus *maya* is defined as the habitude of having being. Here Brahmabandhav is philosophical as both Thomas and the Hindus. The point to note here is this: In Vedanta ultimately there are no individuals. For Brahmabandhav individuals do not exist, of course, by necessity, but God has given each soul eternally existing state. And it is through the power of *maya* that these soul

are kept from dwindling into nothingness. Thus Brahmabandhav comes to the conclusion that therefore the spirit of man will not merge with the divine in such a way that his individuality is lost, but to know God and to like him. It is a communion and not a union.

We have already seen that Brahmabandhav does not use the term *avatara* for Christ. This is deliberate. For him *avatara* of the Hindu deities is qualitatively different from the incarnation of Christ. His details are interesting. He holds that the human is, according to vedanta, composed of five sheaths: animate, vital, mental, intellectual to spiritual. While in human beings these five sheaths are controlled by personality (*aham*), in the incarnate Son they are activated by the *Logos* or the *cit* of the Trinity. Hence they are very different from the *avataras*, of the Hindu *puranas*. For this reason Upadhyaya calls Christ often as *narahari* (*nara* = man, *hari* is the proper name for Vishnu) God-Man. Many Christians took offense at his use of Krishna's name for Christ. His pen name is also Narahari Das (the slave of *narahari*, the slave of Christ). Following Sen, Brahmabandhav also rejects the lie of Christian avatarism, for incarnation is far higher than the *avatara* of Hindus.

Why then did Brahmabandhav advocate the worship of Hindu deities such as Saraswati and Krishna? Scholars give a two-fold answer: one, being caught up in the nationalistic spirit of the Indian freedom movement, it was necessary for him to appeal to the Hindu heritage; secondly, having assured Christ's uniqueness by calling him Brahman, he does not see any harm being done in calling other deities at a lower level of *avatara* or *ishwara*. For him therefore these deities are just historical figures or moral leaders but not to the level of Christ. In any case, such a position of worship of Gods by Brahmabandhav is a very dangerous one.

#### THE CHURCH AND INDIGENISATION

As we have seen, Brahmabandhav was disillusioned by the church structures. [Boyd mentions that he even encouraged others on occasions to use the Church in the

court]. But he did recognize the need for a visible organized institution for the regular ministry of the Word and the sacraments. Yet towards his mature age, because of his almost entire involvement in politics, he seems to have abandoned the church. Also because he died suddenly he was cremated by the Hindus and not by the church. To some this means that he died a Hindu.

But he was quite strong in condemning the Europeanness of the Indian Church. He was right in saying that the Hindu brethren cannot see the subtlety and sanctity of Christian religion because of the cloak of Europeanism, of trousers and hat, spoon and fork, meat and wine. So he says an Indian can be both Hindu and Christian at the same time. This understanding led Brahmabandhav also to found what he called a Hindu Catholic Sanyas Ashram. Of course such attempt was preceded by De Nobili and followed by Sunder Singh. In all this Brahmabandhav was far ahead of his time. Perhaps more than any other Indian thinker he raised the credibility of the Christian message before the Indian philosophy to its highest level.

#### **Evaluation**

##### **Strengths**

1. He had a very high Christology. In calling Christ Brahman he was very understandable before the Hindu brethren.
2. His zeal for indigenisation of the Christian message makes him an uncalled but sent missionary to the Hindus.
3. His understanding of the Bible as the revealed word of God is definitely conservative.

##### **Weakness**

1. His almost uncritical use of the Thomistic system of nature and supernature makes Brahmabandhav blind to several aspects which come up in Protestantism, such as justification by faith alone.
2. His resort to Vedanta to understand Christ as the higher God in relation to the *avataras* makes the difference

between Christ and others only quantitative rather than qualitative.

3. His finding of *Logos Spermatikos* in the Vedas, even to the extent of finding the purer Christian message there, dilutes the authority of the Bible.

4. His understanding of Christ as the atonement for the sins of the world is anything but the penal substitution which the Bible emphasizes.

## NEHEMIAH GOREH (1825 - 1895)

### **Background**

Like Narayan Vaman Tilak and Pandita Ramabai, Goreh was of Chitpavan Konkanasth Brahman descent, a very aggressive, fanatically orthodox Hindu background. He was born in Kasipura (near Jhansi), but went in his early childhood to Benares studying Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy. As such, he naturally learnt to despise Christianity, because for Chitpavans Christianity was the religion of the *Mlechchhas* (pagans). He read extensively works written against Christianity, and engaged in heated arguments with missionaries. He got hold of the Bible and began to read it. As he came to the Sermon on the Mount, he exclaimed,

Who is this teacher who speaks in this manner? . . . No mere man, however holy, can preach this sort of sermon. Surely the author must be divine!

This was his turning point. After a few discussions with the missionary William Smith, and with his own relatives (giving them a last chance to argue him out of his new found faith), he finally took baptism in 1848 with the name Nehemiah instead of Nilakanth. He was commonly known as father Goreh, after his ordination into the Anglican ministry.

His first wife of childhood marriage had already died, so he married a second time. His daughter was the well-known hymn writer, Lakshmi Goreh, the author of "In the secret of his presence how my soul delights to hide". Both his family and he had to suffer persecution on account of Christian

faith — the wife being drugged and kidnapped. Eventually she died after receiving baptism by her husband.

He visited England twice (1854 & 76), as the pundit for Maharaja Dulip Singh, and met queen Victoria II. This Indian apologist of the Christian faith was very welcome there and on his return from the first trip he was ordained as a priest and worked in Indore, Panchoudh, Mhow, Chanda, Bombay and Pandarapur. Later he settled down in Pune, a stronghold of aggressive Hindus, in order to witness to them about Christ. In 1876 he was accepted as a novice of the Society of St. John the evangelist, also called the Gowley Fathers. He remained a novice till his death in 1895.

Father Goreh led many significant personalities to Christ including the Rev. Ranthonji Navaraji of the CMS of Aurangabad, Rev. Khasim Bhai of Satara, Mr. Shahu Daji Kukade and others. But the most prominent was Pandita Ramabai. At a time when she had decided to reject Christianity, there came an unexpected letter from father Goreh, which seems to have answered the queries of Ramabai at the time and so accepted Christ on that basis. Later on she writes that none else could have caused to change her mind except father Goreh.

### **Goreh's writings**

Beside a very gifted and fruitful preaching ministry, Goreh was also a gifted writer. He published more than 35 works in English, Hindi and Marathi. His magnum opus is the Hindu apologetic, *Shaddarshana Darpana* published also in English, *A Rational Refutation of the (six) Hindu Philosophical Systems*. His other important works included tracts in answer to objections against certain points in Christianity, lectures and addresses, theism and Christianity, god's foreknowledge of man's free will, and the existence of Brahmoism. In these books, Goreh courageously inserted a subtitle like "Hindu Philosophy examined by a Benares Pundit", "By a converted Hindu Brahmin" etc. Having suffered for the faith, he never drew back from identifying himself as a converted Brahmin from Benares.

## Goreh's Thought

In a nut-shell, Goreh's thought can be summarized as a Church-in-witness-and-defense theology. His primary mission was to give an apologetic against reformed Hinduism such as Brahma Samaj and Prarthana Samaj, though not the militant Arya Samaj. His argumentation against the Brahma teaching runs: Hindu shastras, being pantheistic and monistic are unlike the Bible, which is to do with the ultimate destiny of mankind, and therefore true revelation; Brahmos' concepts are to a very large extent from the Bible and not from the Hindu shastras. Therefore, they are compelled on their basis to accept the rest of the Bible also as their authority. Here Goreh came in direct confrontation with Max Mueller, the liberal Orientalist who was infatuated with anything Hindu.

In his apologetic Goreh finds the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as the most important for theology. In all the Hindu philosophies, the world has both existed from eternity as well as it has an ultimate material cause. As such none of them really understanding Brahman or God as omnipotent; only the biblical account of creation out of nothing makes God totally sovereign. If the world is an illusion, then God's power and authority are still less real! The final inference of the Hindu system is a dilemma: If only Brahman is real, then to make the world false and illusion and at the same time to say the world is Brahman is a logical inconsistency. Therefore it must be rejected by thinking persons. Goreh's rigorous logic is also applied to the concept of Brahman: the Nirguna Brahman, as he/it is qualityless, it is in fact zero! (Saguna Brahman, being a part of the world of *maya*, is in any case no more than nothing, illusion). Brahman is unknowable, because he is not! But as for the personal God of the Bible, being the world's creator, support and end, nothing higher than him is imaginable.

Goreh's logical method is best illustrated in his dealing with the vedantic assertion that atman is Brahman:

It is a maxim of Vedanta, that "The soul is Brahman itself, and nothing other". How, I would ask the Vedantin, can this

be? For they assert that, on the one hand, soul errs by reason of ignorance; and that on the other hand, Brahman is, in essence, ever pure, intelligent, and free, and can never for a moment be otherwise. Still, they maintain that the soul is Brahman, and with interest to reconcile their contradiction, they resort to the most elaborate mystification.

Goreh's own answer to Hindu anthropology is a biblical one: Man is not only a part of God but also of *maya*. More than any other thinker he emphasized the Fall and the fact of sin with utmost seriousness. He approves that "the frightful nature of sin deserves a punishment whose severity is beyond the reach of conception." But such punishments are not just for good, but primarily to satisfy the justice of God — it is God's due. Sin is a positive evil force, not just privative good. The Hindu concept of *karma*, making both virtue and vice lead to bondage, lacks such a serious understating of sin. For Goreh sin is serious because it is on account of this that he turned to Christianity.

It was the doctrine of everlasting punishment which shook my soul from very bottom, and forced me to come away, at any cost, from the path of error, and I resolved in my mind to strive with all my might to leave of sin and follow holiness and virtue.<sup>7</sup>

Boyd aptly calls Goreh 'a fearful saint' rather than a joyful one!

His idea of salvation is also impeccably orthodox. For him salvation from this terrible power of sin over man and from the wrath to come is purely by God's grace through Christ's atoning death, and appropriated by faith. Christ as a lamb of God was sacrificed once for all for our sake, as a penal substitution in our place. It is through the death of Christ that we are made partakers of God's nature as a Church — and not like Vedantic identification of Atman with Brahman. He dares to ask whether such an identification was really a misunderstanding, though *preparatio evangelica*.

This brings us to another vital theme Goreh dealt in his writings — the relation of Hinduism with Christianity. Though Goreh attacked Hindu philosophy mercilessly, like

all eminent Indian thinkers he too was wholly indigenous in his approach and in content. He rejected western lifestyle in all its varieties. "The Western trappings of the Church repelled him". He felt himself wholly Indian, and believed that in a hidden manner God is preparing them through Hinduism to respond positively to Christ.

Providence has certainly prepared us, the Hindus, to receive Christianity, in a way which, it seems to me, no other nation – excepting the Jews of course – has been prepared.

He finds this *preparatio evangelica* in the Gita's teaching of *Ananyabhakti* (undivided devotion), *Vairagya* (renunciation of the world), *Namratha* (humility), *Kshama* (forgiveness), and the like. On a higher level, incarnation (as *avatara*) miracles are also a foreshadowing of the Christian gospel. Anticipating Farquhar, Goreh says that Christ is the fulfillment of Hindu longings; this is the divine light which was to light every man who cometh into the world, namely, the light of reason and logic. To logic he turned heavily in his defense of the gospel.

### **Evaluation**

Since Goreh is unquestionably in the main line orthodox, it is difficult to find fault with his theology. But his emphasis – unlike the modern de-emphasis – was undoubtedly on the Church and its sacraments. Since he grapples with the issues of brahmoism and the Hindu philosophies his theology is also most relevant and has a cutting edge. Like any of his contemporaries, he also accepts without questions the genuineness and the ultimate authority of the Scripture for the Church. And finally, almost uniquely Goreh adheres to the heart of the Christian gospel – the penal substitutionary understanding of Christ's death and parts company with most of the Indian Christian theologians of repute.

There are also couple of loop-holes in his thinking. For example, in spite of all his refutation of Hindu thinking, Goreh never mentions the crucial Hindu doctrine of *karmasansara* and reincarnation. And further there is an

element of in-built antipathy to Hinduism, and almost nothing is positive in Hinduism for him. Being a churchman, it is to be expected that his Christianity was Anglican Christianity, closely adhering to its 39 articles and the book of common prayer. Goreh seems to be the Indian Aquinas of all the Indian Protestant theologians; it is he who has used Aristotelian kind of logic rather extensively. Some times this approach gives the reader the impression that his theology is based on reason than on the Scripture. But if we remind ourselves that Goreh's audiences were Hindus and Brahmos who required a particular kind of argumentation, then such a "rational refutation" falls into its place without jeopardizing the authority of the Bible.

### **LAL BEHARI DEY (1824-1894)**

Born in Talpur (Bengal), educated in the General Assembly Institution founded by Alexander Duff, Dey mastered the English language very early – perhaps it was appropriate that his baptism later took place in an English library! He was just nineteen at that time, and consented because he was intellectually convinced of the truth of the Christian message (some time you should study the relationship between being intellectually convinced of the gospel truth, and being convicted of one's sin by the Holy Spirit!) against the Vedanta philosophy. He was ordained in 1855 and served as an Anglican minister. Later the British government recognized his abilities and put him in charge of its Educational Service. He also taught as a professor of English literature, history, philosophy. The moving part of his life is the last five years, when he became totally blind and invalid in other ways. His faith and full acceptance of God's will with cheerfulness amidst affliction is witness to Dey's staunch commitment to Christ. His family's unswerving love during this period seems to have brought him closer to the Lord. He used to say, "I shall not be blind in heaven!" Few Christians can witness to the Christian hope that is in them like Dey. Lal Behari Dey's main concern was to unite and indigenise the Indian church. He dreamt and wrote about the national Church in India which will be fully freed from

the Western yoke. His writings include: *On Vedantism, Papers for Thoughtful Hindus, The Desirability and Practicability of Organizing a National Church of Bengal, Bengali Peasant Life*, etc. He also edited periodicals, including *Friday Review* and *Indian Reformer*.

### **Dey's Thought**

We could pick up three emphases in his thought.

#### **RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY**

Living in the Brahmo atmosphere of the time, Dey vehemently rejected the Brahmo concept of authority – be it Vedas, nature or human reason. He disputed that though man's mind is great, there is that blight of sin upon it, and a worm is eating at human reason so that he cannot think anything properly! This necessitates revelation, and at the most reason can only confirm this truth, not discover it. As such, Brahmoism is baseless, having no proper authority, while Christian message is authentic, based on the Word of God, the divine revelation – a thoroughly orthodox position!

#### **SIN AND SALVATION**

Here again, the attack is against the Brahmos. Emphasizing God's love against the rest of the divine attributes, the Brahmos have taken away the necessity of punishment for sin, alleged Dey. According to them, God forgives all sins lovingly, unconditionally. Human sin does not affect God.

Thus for the Brahmos, there is a serious lack in the seriousness of sin. Hence the biblical concept of wrath of God and the consequent need of sacrifices is alien to them – the truths on which the message of the cross is essentially based. The gospel, on the contrary, reveals God's hatred for sin, and the necessity of atonement. Dey's theses in this connection are remarkably biblical: i) God's punishment is his active holiness; ii) Punishment is neither chastisement nor a consequence of sin, but a vindication of God's honour and justice; iii) Since sin brings infinite punishment, only an infinite person, Jesus as the son of

God, can atone for it – thus incarnation is a necessity; iv) Man needs not only freedom from the power of sin but also remission of it; v) True repentance is a decision to reform, not remorse. One could say Amen!

#### **DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH**

Dey affirmed, somewhat in old Anglican fashion, that saving doctrines are the property of the Church (cf. the Catholic principle: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* - Outside the Church there is no salvation). He maintained that since one form of the Church is more biblical than the other, it is important to know which one is most scriptural. Yet in practice it is hard to play one denomination as being more scriptural than another. The only other alternative is to consider all denominations, including Roman Catholics and the Orthodox, as preserving true essence of the Church. Dey seems to have tended to take the Apostle's Creed as a sufficient basis for the unity of all churches. In any case his zeal for ecumenism and national Church stems from this positive attitude to all persuasions. As such Dey was influenced more by the ecumenical spirit than missionary spirit.

#### **Evaluation**

We have already said Amen to Dey's soteriology and the understanding of the cross, so there is little more left to evaluate. Remember: Christology is central to all Christian theology, and the Cross and resurrection are the essence of all Christologies. The best way to evaluate one's thought is to ask at once, what does he say about Jesus' cross and resurrection? You can accept or reject his whole system on that single test! In the light of this, Dey's imprecise approach to denominations, a premature zeal to Church unity and the lack of missionary concern can be pardoned!

## NOTES

1. Sri Parananda, *The Gospel of Jesus According to St. Matthew*, 1898, p. 49
2. Animananda, *The Blade*, p. 68.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 71f.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
5. Bramabandhav has written a beautiful hymn in Sanskrit on the Trinity. Many translations are available.
6. Animananda, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
7. N. Goreh, *A Letter to the Brahmos from a Converted Brahman from Banares*, 2nd Edition, 1868, p. 52.